



Wisconsin Celebrates National Farm to School Month in October

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MADISON – October in Wisconsin brings a bountiful harvest of corn, pumpkins, apples, cranberries, and so much more. Through the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP) AmeriCorps Farm to School Program, students can enjoy these Wisconsin-grown products at school. In Crawford County, AmeriCorps Members Kathleen Hein and Kate Maxfield are celebrating October as National Farm to School Month by serving pumpkin soup and seeds to about 700 students.

“Through Farm to School, students are willing to try fruits and vegetables they have never seen before that are found locally, are healthy, and taste delicious,” said Hein. “During a Harvest of the Month, students learn about how a Wisconsin food is grown, harvested, and prepared. A third grade student went home from school, gave his mom the pumpkin soup recipe, and the family made it for dinner that night.”

Through Farm to School, students can participate in taste-testing, farm field trips, garden activities, and cooking demonstrations. By partnering local farmers with schools, Farm to School can stimulate the local economy and change students’ lives by promoting healthy eating habits to decrease childhood obesity.

“The school food service director sees a difference in student choices in the lunch room, selecting more fruits and vegetables and taking advantage of a salad bar that is available daily,” explained Hein. “With Farm to School, our students also have access to a healthy snack three times a week and an opportunity to participate in a school garden program.”

DATCP manages the state’s AmeriCorps Farm to School Program providing support, technical assistance, and training to the partner sites. DATCP currently has 17 AmeriCorps members at seven partner sites impacting 22 school districts. This year’s partner sites include: Ashland/Bayfield Counties, Spooner School District, Portage County, UW-Extension Waupaca County, UW-Extension Crawford County, Vernon County, and REAP of Dane County.

“Farm to School changes an entire community by connecting farmers, students, parents, and community members,” concludes Hein. “In our area a farmers’ market has started, a new local foods group meets monthly, and there is so much excitement to make our students healthier and support our farmers.”

In November 2010, Congress approved a resolution to officially designate October 2011 as the first National Farm to School Month. This month allows us to recognize the importance of child nutrition and educating children about the origins of food. The AmeriCorps Farm to School program began in Wisconsin in 2008. Since its beginning, the program has worked with 12 partner sites, placed 79 service members, and served 20,000 students statewide.

Results from a one year evaluation done at the AmeriCorps sites by a University of Wisconsin-Madison Researcher Team at the UW-Department of Family Medicine show that Farm to School increases knowledge and attitudes as well as consumption of fruits and vegetables among children by providing more access to fruits and vegetables through meals program. Improvements in student behaviors tended to increase incrementally with more years of Farm to School programming implying that Farm to School programs may have gradual, yet sustaining positive impact on student health behaviors. ###



AmeriCorps Member Kathleen Hein of Crawford County distributes samples to students as part of Farm to School. October is National Farm to School Month.